

SOPHOCLES

ANTIGONE

**A Translation
by
David Wulstan Myatt**

Preface

The main aims of the present translation are to provide an accurate and poetic rendering in a style suitable for both reading and dramatic performance, and enable readers without a knowledge of ancient Greek to understand why Greek drama has been highly regarded for thousands of years. As often with Sophocles and Aeschylus, it is the Choral Odes which we most often admire and quote, as in:

By Cyanaei of the two-fold sea
Are the Bosphorus shores
And Thracian Salmydessus
Where Ares, dwelling close by the citadel,
Beheld the two sons of Phineas
Blinded by ruinous wounds
Dealt by that savage second wife -
A blinding of orbs the seeing of which brought vengeance -
By sticking at them with the points
Of her weaver's spindle, blood staining her hands.

Antigone,
v.966f

The layout of the translation generally follows the line structure of the Greek, although for grammatical and dramatic reasons I have sometimes rendered one line of Greek as two English ones, and occasionally written one English line for two Greek ones. The numbers in the margin refer to the Greek text and are given for guidance.

The text used is that of R.D. Dawe [*Sophocles Tragoedia, Tom.II, Teubner, 1985*] although in a few places I have used other readings.

DW Myatt
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(Revised 1994)

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Introduction

The 'Antigone' of Sophocles - which follows his 'Oedipus the King' and 'Oedipus at Colonus' - seems, at first glance, to be concerned with the conflict between Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus, and Creon, the new ruler of the community at Thebes, who was the brother of Jocasta, the mother and wife of Oedipus.

Polynices and Eteocles, the two sons of Oedipus (and thus the brothers of Antigone, and her sister, Ismene), had quarrelled with Polynices leaving Thebes and returning with an attacking force which he hoped would take the fortified citadel, defended by Eteocles. In the ensuing battle, Polynices and Eteocles fought and killed each other, with the attackers routed and forced to flee.

One of Creon's first edicts, as ruler of Thebes, is to forbid anyone to bury or mourn for Polynices. This edict goes against the established custom which permitted those foes fallen in battle to be honoured by their relatives with the customary rites and then buried.

Antigone defies this edict even though she knows her disobedience will mean her own death. She believes that the ancient customs, given by the gods and which thus honour the gods, have priority over any edict or law made by a mortal, and that thus it is her duty to observe these customs.

The reality, however, is that the 'Antigone' is a not a tragedy concerned with individual characters, with their motivations, feelings, ideas and so on. It is not, for instance, a drama about a conflict between two different personalities - Antigone and Creon - both of whom are self-willed and determined.

Rather, this tragedy deals with the relation between mortals and gods. The work is an exploration and explanation of the workings of the cosmos, and the answers given express the distinctive ancient Greek 'outlook' or ethos. This ethos is pagan, and its essence may be said to be that there are limits to human behaviour; that some conduct is wise, some conduct is unwise. Unwise conduct invites retribution by the gods: it can and often does result in personal misfortune, in bad luck.

This outlook does not therefore involve monotheistic notions like an abstract "good" and "evil". The Greeks strove to emulate a human ideal, and, through the pursuit of *arête*, to emulate and celebrate the best. Their ideals or 'archetypes' were those considered to be the most heroic, the most beautiful, the most excellent, individuals of their communities. But in their pursuit of this excellence they were careful not to "overstep the mark", to be excessive, to commit 'hubris', or 'insolence' toward the gods. Such insolence was a violation of the customs which created and maintained the warrior communities, with these customs being regarded as given by the gods. By honouring these customs, the gods themselves were honoured and the very fabric of the

communities maintained. Thus, a noble human balance was maintained.

Of course, there were times of excess, as there were individuals who were excessive. But it was recognized that such excesses were unwise, for they would, sooner or later, be paid for. In effect, this outlook or ethos was that of individuals aware of the power of Fate, of the gods, and created and maintained a certain personal character evident whenever one reads Homer, Sophocles, Aeschylus, and other Greek writers, or views any Greek sculpture or painting. The essentially archetypal Greek man, for instance, was an intelligent, reasoning, proud, vigorous, warrior who for the most part respected the gods, who believed in prophetic oracles, and who honoured the customs of their ancestors. Fundamentally, such a person was human, able to enjoy life and its pleasures, but aware (from personal experience) of death, suffering, the power of Fate and of the gods.

What many of us admire so much about the ancient Greeks was this balance between a pagan joy and enthusiasm, and an understanding and acceptance of Fate, of the power of the gods, and in the rightly-famed Choral Ode of the Antigone (vv. 332ff) Sophocles calls such a man the "thinking warrior", the all-resourceful one who, however, was still mindful that their good fortune, their health, their victories, and their life, depended on the gods.

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Characters:

Antigone

Ismene

Chorus of Theban Elders

Creon

A Watchman

Haemon

Tiresias

A Messenger

Eurydice

Scene: Before the wealthy dwelling of Creon at Thebes

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Antigone

[Antigone and Ismene enter]

Antigone

Ismene, my own sister by blood,
Do you see how Zeus fulfills in us
While we live the woes of Oedipus?
There is no pain, no affliction, no shame
Nor dishonour that is not present
Among your suffering and mine.

And what of this new proclamation
By the General to all the people?
Have you heard - and know what it means?
Or do you not understand how the suffering
Of our foe now comes to our clan?

Ismene

I have heard of nothing told of our folk, Antigone,
Whether grievous or good since we two
Lost our two brothers killed in one day

By their own two hands.

And since the Argive army fled this same night
I have heard nothing to give me more sorrow or joy.

Antigone

Such was my thought and thus I summoned you
Beyond the courtyard gate so only you can hear this.

Ismene

20 What is it? For I see you colour changed.

Antigone

It is that Creon has given burial honour
To only one of our brothers, leaving the other dishonoured!
Eteocles, it is reported, has with rightful justice
Been concealed in earth to thus be given tribute
By the dead below. But pitiful is the death of Polynices
For by royal decree no one may cover him,
Lament his death or weep
But must leave him unburied as a welcome feast
For carrion birds to eat as they will.
Such, they say, is the proclamation of Creon "*the noble*"
For you and me. For me! And soon shall he be here
To proclaim this directly to those who have not heard.
He does not hold this as of no worth

Since whosoever disobeys the edict
Shall - by a public stoning in the citadel - be murdered!

Thus things are - and now you shall swiftly show
If you are noble or will debase the race that gave you birth!

Ismene

But what, my grieving sister, can I do
40 To loosen or make the knot?

Antigone

Will you work with me to do the deed?

Ismene

To attempt what? Where is your thought leading?

Antigone

With your hand help me raise the corpse.

Ismene

You intend to bury him though our folk forbid it?

Antigone

He is mine, as yours - though you wish he was not:
I shall never betray a brother.

Ismene

How reckless, when Creon has spoken against it!

Antigone

He cannot keep me from my own!

Ismene

Have thought, sister, of how our father,

Dishonoured and abhorred, was destroyed:

He convicted himself of wrong and by his own hands

With his own act struck out both his eyes.

Then his mother and wife - two names for one -

With a coiled rope made a failure of her life.

And third - our two brothers in one day

Slaughtered themselves when their own hands

Were raised each against their kin.

Consider now that we alone remain -

Pitifully shall we perish if we defy the decree

60 Or the power of our King.

Reflect that we are women, not disposed

By our nature to strive against men -

For the stronger rule, and therefore we should listen

To such orders, and those that are worse.

I thus ask the pardon of those below
Since in these things I have no power
And must therefore obey those in authority.
To be excessive is unwise.

Antigone

No more shall I exhort you, and even if another day
You wished it, I would not welcome your sharing
In the deed! Be as you are; as for me, I shall bury him
Since it is beautiful to die doing such a thing:
I shall lie by he whom I love who loves me,
I - the villain sanctioned by the gods. For I have
More seasons to spend pleasing those below
Than those here since I shall lie there forever.
But if you deem it, then dishonour
What the gods themselves honour.

Ismene

I do not dishonour them: I have no strength
And cannot act against the folk.

Antigone

80 So you say; I shall go alone to raise
A burial mound over my beloved brother.

Ismene

You unhappy woman! I fear for you.

Antigone

Have no anxiety for me. Follow your own Destiny.

Ismene

If you must - then do not announce the deed

But keep it secret, as I shall.

Antigone

No, announce it! I shall detest you more

If you keep silent and do not proclaim it to all.

Ismene

A hot heart you have for cold things.

Antigone

I appease those whom it is necessary to please.

Ismene

Indeed, if it can be done - but your desire is impossible.

Antigone

If so, I shall stop only when strength fails.

Ismene

But to begin a hopeless quest is not cunning.

Antigone

Do not speak so, or you will become my foe

And then, justly, the lasting foe of the dead.

Now leave me to my 'mistaken' counsel

For I shall suffer nothing as terrible

As a dishonourable death if I should die.

Ismene

Go then, if resolved: but know that although foolish,

Those who love you will love you still.

[Exit Antigone and Ismene;

Enter Chorus]

Chorus

Ray of the sun, most beautiful light

Ever to shine upon seven-Gated Thebes -

As a golden eye opening over Dirce's streams

Have you revealed how the white-shielded Argive warrior

In full armour

Swiftly fled with bridle whistling.

Against our soil quarrelling Polynices

Came forth

Shrilly screaming

As an eagle soaring over our land

On wings white like snow;

With many weapons

And helmet of horse-hair crest

He lingered over roofs - blood-seeking and gaping wide -

To circle with spears the seven gates:

But then was gone

Before his jaws were stained by our blood

Or the pine-fire torches burnt the circle of our towers

Because the clash of Ares sounded against him

Since the dragon he found was a difficult foe

To subdue!

For Zeus greatly hates the over-boasting tongue

And watched them gushing forth -

Their gold clanging in pride -

Before He hurled the fire that He holds

At he shouting victory

As he rushed up to those posts

That were his prize!

Swaying then, he fell to beat against earth -

This fire-bearer who with madness

Rushed in Bacchic frenzy

To breathe against us winds of hate.

Thus, what he wished, was not

140 While to the others great Ares with vigour

Delivered his blows.

Their seven Chiefs were each at our seven gates opposed,

And forced to leave their bronze

As offerings to Zeus, router-of-foes:

Save for those two unhappy ones born

Of the same mother and father

Who levelled their spears for the double-kill

One against the other

To share then the same dying.

Yet since Nike - She giving glory - has come

To Thebes of the many chariots, adding joy to our joy,

Let the battles become forgotten

As there is the circle-of-the-dance all night

In all the Temples of the gods which Bacchus -

Shaker of the ground that is Thebes - shall lead!

[Enter Creon]

But now comes the Lord of this land,

Creon - son of Menoeceus - the new Commander

Whose new fate is given by the gods:
To where is he rowing
And why this special calling of Elders to assemble
By sending proclamation to them all?

Creon

Men - our citadel which the gods greatly shook with storm
Has, by them, been made secure again.
Out of everyone I chose you, sending my escort
To bring you alone here because primarily you I know
Respected always the authority of the throne of Laius -
And also because when Oedipus raised up our clan,
As well as after his sons had died, your thinking was unchanged.
Now since through their two fates those two in one day
Were each struck down by their own hand and became thus defiled,
It is I who now possess the power and the throne
Because nearest in kin to those who were killed.

Although it is difficult to learn the soul, spirit or judgement
Of any man until his leadership and his laws
Have been seen because experienced -
I, for myself, believe now as before
That whoever, in ruling a whole clan,
Does not give noble counsel
Because some fear keeps his tongue still,
Is the vilest person of all,

Just as I deem those who consider some friend
Before their own fatherland to be worthless.
For I - and in this I invoke Zeus, the All-seeing -
Would not keep myself from speaking should our people
Move from safety toward some harm.

Neither would I have as friend a man hostile
To my soil since I know that it is she
Who preserves us like a ship uncapsized
Allowing us thus to have friends.

Thus shall I by such customs nourish this clan -
And, as kin of these, I have made a proclamation
To the people concerning the sons of Oedipus.
Eteocles, who fought for his people and who died
The most valiant warrior of them all,
Shall be covered in a cairn and given
All rites as befits the valiant who have died.

But as for his blood-kin, called Polynices -
He who returned from exile to seek
200 To utterly destroy with fire
The race of his ancestors, his gods and his clan,
Who wanted to feast upon kindred blood
And enslave what remained of his clan -
As for him, it has been proclaimed to the clan
That there shall be no cairn, no honours
As due to the dead, no lamentation:

He shall be left unburied for all to watch
The corpse mutilated and eaten by carrion-birds and by dogs!

Such is my judgement, for I shall never
Honour the ignoble nor place them before the just:
Yet whoever is friendly toward the clan I shall esteem
While they live, and when they are dead.

Chorus

It is your delight, son of Menoeceus, so to deal
With the friend and foe of our clan
Since your will is surely law for all:
Both the dead, and we who live.

Creon

Be then watchmen for my commands.

Chorus

Ask someone younger to bear that task.

Creon

Others are already watching the corpse.

Chorus

What other command of yours, then, is for us?

Creon

Not to agree with those who would disobey.

Chorus

Only a fool would love death.

Creon

Such indeed is the reward - but hope

Of profit often drives men to ruin.

[Enter Watchman]

Watchman

Master - I shall not speak of how I swiftly

And panting reached here on nimble feet,

For many were the thoughts I had to stop me

And turn me round in circling paths.

My psyche spoke to me saying many things:

'Unhappy one, why do you go to where you will be punished?'

'Why, you wretch, do you stop? For if Creon learns

Of this from another man you will surely suffer pain.'

In turning these around, I could not hasten

But slowly lingered, making the short path long.

Yet at last victory came to my coming here to you

For although what I announce may be nothing,

I shall speak it, since I am seized by the belief
That I can suffer only what my fate decrees.

Creon

What is it that has made you lose your courage?

Watchman

I want, first, to tell of myself -
Since I did not do the deed nor see who did
240 It is not just for me to suffer for it.

Creon

You aim well after barricading yourself by circling around
The deed - revealing you have something strange to tell.

Watchman

Danger brings much delay.

Creon

So deliver what it is - then go.

Watchman

Then I shall speak it - just now the corpse
Was covered by someone, since gone, for dry dust

Moistened the flesh, giving thus the necessary rites.

Creon

Of what are you telling? For what man would risk this?

Watchman

I did not see - and there were no cuts
Of an axe, no soil thrown out. The earth
Was hard and dry, unbroken by the travelling wheels
Of a cart, for this workman left no marks.

When the first watchman of the day showed us,
It was a distressing wonder for us all
For we could not see the body - yet there was no cairn
Only a covering of dust as if done to escape the disgrace.
There were no signs of wild animals or of dogs
Being there - nor of their tearing
And, loudly, bad words went from one of us to another
260 With guard accusing guard and with blows
To end it, for there was no one to restrain us:
Someone had done it, yet each of us was clear
In turn that they had not, with no one convicted.
We were willing to hold hot iron in our hands,
To walk into fire, to before the gods take oath
That we did not do the deed, nor consult before with
Or help those who did perform it.

At last, when our seeking came to nothing
One of us in speaking made us all lower our heads
Toward the ground in fear since none of us
Could speak against it nor say how we would stay
Healthy if we agreed. He said we should not
Conceal it but must bring an account to you.
We, on this, agreed and by the casting of lots
It was my unhappy fate to be condemned to that joy.
Thus, as unwilling as you are to see me I approached here
Since no one is pleased by the messenger heralding ill.

Chorus

Master - from the first I considered
That this deed might be the work of the gods.

Creon

280 Cease your words or I shall become glutted with wroth
And you revealed as both stupid and old!
I cannot endure your words when you speak
Of our guardian gods caring about this corpse!
Did they esteem him as beneficent
And thus bury him? - he who came to set on fire
Their spacious Temples, their votive offerings, their land,
And to break their customs! Have you beheld

The gods honouring the bad? There is no such thing!

Yet just now there were among our clan

Men hostile to my edict who in secret whispered

Against me, rearing their heads instead of keeping their necks

Under the yoke as and when I deem it fitting.

For, indeed, I well understand it is they who hired

These others and by such means caused this deed to be done:

For, among men, it is silver as coins

That brings forth base customs - that thing ravages clans,

Drives men from their homes, trains honest mortals well

How to turn from reason and practice dishonest deeds!

It instructs men in cunning arts, making them

To know all kinds of acts of destruction.

Yet all hirelings

Finally pay by having to yield to what is right.

[Creon turns to speak to the Watchman]

Since I, at least, still hold Zeus in awe,

Then understand this - and I speak an oath -

If you do not discover he who by his own hands

Did this burial and reveal him before my own eyes,

Then not even Hades by itself will suffice for you

For first you will be strung up alive

Until you reveal your insolence -

This will be a lesson as to where profit may be obtained

For such a plundering will have taught you

Not to love gain from wherever it comes.

And it will be seen that from such dishonourable receiving
More are injured than are safe.

Watchman

Can I speak - or may I turn and go?

Creon

Have you not seen how your words pain me?

Watchman

Where is your wound - in your ears, or in your soul?

Creon

Do you instruct me as to how I am injured?

Watchman

The doer assaults your reason - I, your ears.

Creon

It is clear that you grew to be a babbler.

Watchman

Even if so, I did not do this deed.

Creon

You did: and abandoned your soul for silver!

Watchman

How fearful - to assume when such assumption is false!

Creon

What elegant opinions you have! But if you do not reveal
To me those who did it, you will be gushing forth
That cowardly gains injure those who make them!

[Exit Creon]

Watchman

Before all may he be discovered - but whether caught
Or not, it is fate which chooses.
Whatever, I shall not come here again
For I beyond my hope and reason am kept safe
And for this have a duty to give to the gods many favours.

[Exit Watchman]

Chorus

There exists much that is strange, yet nothing
Has more strangeness than we human beings:

For this being crosses the gray sea of Winter
Against the wind, through the howling sea swell,
And the oldest of gods, ageless Earth -
She the inexhaustible -
He wearies, turning the soil year after year
By the plough using the offspring of horses.

He snares and captures the careless race of birds,
The tribes of wild beasts, the natives of the sea,
In the woven coils of his nets -
This thinking warrior: he who by his skill rules over
The wild beasts of the open land and the hills,
And who places a yoke around the hairy neck
Of the horse, taming it - and the vigorous mountain bull.

His voice, his swift thought,
The raising and ordering of towns:
How to build against the ill-winds of the open air
And escape the arrows of storm-rain -
All these things he taught himself,
He the all-resourceful
From whom there is nothing he does not meet
Without resources - except Hades
From which even he cannot contrive an escape
Although from unconquered disease
He plans his refuge.

365 Beyond his own hopes, his cunning
In inventive arts - he who arrives
Now with dishonour, then with chivalry:
Yet, by fulfilling his duties to the soil,
His oaths to the customs given by the gods,
Noble is his clan although clan-less is he who dares
To dwell where and with whom he please -
Never shall any who do this
Come to my hearth or I share their judgement.

[Enter Antigone and Watchman]

Now this sign from the god
I cannot speak against
For I see that the girl brought here
Is Antigone.
Unfortunate daughter of Oedipus the unfortunate -
What is this?
Can it be that you are brought here
For being faithless to the Chief's law -
Caught in an act lacking reason?

Watchman

Here is the one who did the deed:
We captured her burying him. But where is Creon?

Chorus

From his dwelling he now fittingly arrives.

[Enter Creon]

Creon

What is it that makes my arrival fortunate?

Watchman

Master - we mortals should never swear not to do anything

For an advance in thought cheats our former judgement:

I might have vowed for my desire to return to be weak

Because of your threats - that tempest I went through before.

Yet since that delight which is beyond hope is,

In extent, beyond other pleasures,

I - despite taking oath - have come here,

Leading this maiden whom I captured giving rites

Of burial. There was then no need to cast and draw lots

For this chance was mine and mine alone.

So now, Master, take hold of her yourself

And examine and question her according to your will.

Thus it is fitting that I go

400 Completely free of these troubles.

Creon

This maiden you lead - how and where was she caught?

Watchman

Burying that man. Now all by you is known.

Creon

Do you clearly hear what your words announce?

Watchman

I saw her giving forbidden burial rites to that corpse.

Are these words of mine plain and clear?

Creon

Was she seen and seized doing the deed?

Watchman

Thus it was: when I returned there

After those terrible threats you made against us,

All the dust covering the corpse we swept away

To leave the putrid body bare while we sat,

Wind-sheltered, by the top of the hill

To escape the hurling smell.

We kept awake by shaking and loud threats

Those men who did not attend to their work,
And long this continued until Helios with his radiant circle
Had established himself in middle-sky, burning us.

Then suddenly from the earth as a thunderbolt through air
A whirlwind came afflicting the heavens:
Filling the plain, beating all the leaves

420 From the trees of the fields and vomiting them high in the sky
While we closed our eyes against this sickness sent by a god.

And when after much waiting our deliverance came,
We saw this girl who loudly wailed
With the sharp shrill voice of a bird when it beholds
There is nothing lying in the empty nest.

So it was that she on seeing the corpse bare
Loudly wailed and made bad wishes
Against those who had done that deed.

Then suddenly she with her hands brought dry dust
And raised a well-crafted bronze ewer to honour
The corpse with the three-fold libation.

Seeing this, we rushed down to trap her
But she was not surprised and we accused her
Of that act and the one before. She did not deny it -

And this pleased me, yet also gave me pain,
For while it is pleasing to escape suffering oneself
It is painful to bring suffering to a member of one's folk.

Yet all such things are for me less important

440 Than my own escape and survival.

Creon

You there - inclining your head to the ground -
Do you affirm or do you deny doing these things?

Antigone

I did them - and do not deny it!

Creon

[To Watchman:]

As for you, you can convey yourself
Where you will, free from the burden of blame.

[Exit Watchman]

Now, not at great length but briefly, tell me
If you knew of the proclamation made in this case?

Antigone

Certainly I knew - it was clear.

Creon

So even then you dared to violate these laws?

Antigone

It was not Zeus who proclaimed them to me,
Nor did she who dwells with the gods below - the goddess, Judgement -
Lay down for us mortals such laws as those.

Neither did I suppose that your edicts
Had so much strength that you, who die,
Could out-run the unwritten and unchanging
Customs of the gods: for the life of these things
Is not only of yesterday or today, but eternal,
No one remembering their birth.

I did not seek - because I feared any man's pride -
To be punished by the gods for breaking their laws:
For I clearly saw I would die even before your proclamation.

That my death is now sooner, I say is a gain
Since how can he who lives among so many cowards as I
Not find a gain in dying?

There is thus for me no sorrow in this
My destined fate. Yet had I left the corpse
Of my own mother's son unburied
Then I would have sorrow, as I have no sorrow now!

And if you believe I from stupidity performed the deed
Then it is the stupid exposing his own stupidity!

Chorus

Clear it is that this child is the savage offspring
Of a savage father - suffering does not bend her.

Creon

It is known that those too hardened in their thinking
Assuredly fall, for it is the strongest iron,
Baked hard by fire, that is often seen to suddenly shatter,
And a small bridle restrains the angry horse.
It is not allowed for a servant to possess pride.

480 She is well-practised in insolence, in going beyond
The prescribed laws - for after the first, her further
Insolence was to boast of it, and laugh!
Now she would be a man, and I would not
Were she to be master in this and uninjured:
For even were she a child of my sister
Or closer in blood than all in my home -
Who are bound whole by Zeus -
She and her sister would not escape their miserable fate
For I indeed accuse her as well of sharing
In the planning of this burial.

Summon her here! For just now I saw her inside,
Frenzied and not possessing any judgement.
For often the thoughts of those desiring dark deeds

Become revealed before such deeds are done.
And, further, I hate those who when caught
Seek to beautify their baseness and their deeds.

Antigone

Do you will more than herding me to my slaughter?

Creon

Nothing more - when I have that, it is over.

Antigone

Then why delay? Your speech does not please me
500 Nor can ever please me, just as my own is displeasing to you.
For what greater renown could I obtain
Than the renown gained by giving burial to my own brother?
By all these men would this be said
Were their tongues not stopped through fear.
But a King has much wealth
And can speak and act as he himself desires.

Creon

You alone of all the Cadmeans see this.

Antigone

They see: but you stop their mouths from opening.

Creon

But are you not ashamed because alone in such thinking?

Antigone

There is no shame in honouring womb-kin.

Creon

Yet was it not your brother who was killed by the hostile side?

Antigone

A brother, born of my mother and father.

Creon

How then by being dis-honourable to him can you show him respect?

Antigone

He who is dead and below would not bear witness to that!

Creon

He will when your respect is his dis-honour.

Antigone

It was not a slave, but a brother who died.

Creon

He died trying to rape this land which the other one protected!

Antigone

Yet Hades longs for these rites.

Creon

520 But what the decent inherit is not the same as what is given to the bad.

Antigone

Who can see if such things are acceptable to those below us?

Creon

Even in death an enemy is never a friend.

Creon

I came forth not to return hate but to love friends.

Creon

Then when you go into earth, love them, if love them you must.

I, while living, will not be commanded by a woman.

[Enter Ismene]

Chorus

Certain it is that here before the door is Ismene
A cloud above her eyes casting down tears in love
For her sister, drop by drop
To moisten her beauty of face
And shadow her blood-red cheeks.

Creon

You! - who stayed lurking like a snake in my home
Secretly sucking at me for I did not see
I was feeding two destructions and subverters
From my throne -
Tell me, do you say you shared in this burial
Or will you make oath and say you did not know?

Ismene

I did the deed - if she agrees -
And share with her the burden and the blame.

Antigone

But it is not fair to allow you this
Since you did not desire it and I gave you no share.

Ismene

540 Now maledictions assail you, I would be ashamed
Not to sail with you toward misfortune.

Antigone

Of that act, Hades and those below are witness:
As to words, I do not love those who care for them.

Ismene

Sister, do not dishonour me
But let me die with you and so purify his death.

Antigone

My death is not for sharing; do not claim to have touched
What you have not - my dying is sufficiency itself.

Ismene

What life have I to love without you?

Antigone

Ask Creon since you care for him.

Ismene

Why hurt me when it does not profit you?

Antigone

If I laugh, it is from pain that I laugh.

Ismene

How then can I help you?

Antigone

Save yourself - I shall not blame you for escaping.

Ismene

This hurts me! And I then to be deprived of your fate?

Antigone

You chose life: I, my dying.

Ismene

Yet I did not keep silent but spoke.

Antigone

To some, your intentions were right; to others, mine.

Ismene

Why, then, is the fault both yours and mine?

Antigone

Be trusting; you live, but my psyche long ago

560 Perished that I might aid the dead.

Creon

In this, one child now reveals herself without reason

While the other has been without from her beginning.

Ismene

So it is, sir, that sometimes such reason as grows

Is displaced when misfortunes arise.

Creon

Yours was, when you ignobly arose to aid the ignoble.

Ismene

How would I, alone, live without her?

Creon

Do not speak of her as being here - she is nothing!

Ismene

Will you then slay her betrothed to your son?

Creon

There are other furrows for him to plant his plough in.

Ismene

570 But for them it was so fitting.

Creon

I would detest my son having an ignoble wife!

Ismene

Dear Haemon - your father dishonours you!

Creon

You annoy me - you and this marriage!

Ismene

Would you deprive your son of his wife?

Creon

It is Hades who will relieve me of that wedding.

Ismene

So it seems, then, that she will die.

Creon

So it is - by both you and I. No more delay now!
You slaves - take them within!
For they now must be women and thus be constrained.
Even the bold flee when they behold Hades
Very close to their life.

[Exit Antigone and Ismene]

Chorus

Favoured by a divinity are those never tasting badness
Since when a clan is shaken by the gods
There is no misfortune that is missed for generations to come
As when the heavy-breathing sea of Thrace attacks
The deep darkness to roll from the bottom
The black sands
590 And there are sighs and shouts at the ill-winds
As the sea breaks against and over-runs the shore.

I watch those ancient sufferings of the clan of Labdacus
Fall upon the suffering of those dead -
Generation after generation captive
Since a god casts them down,
Giving no release.

The light cast upon the last root of the family of Oedipus

Has become dimmed by the red dust of the gods below,
By speech lacking understanding
And by frenzied judgements.

Zeus - what mortal can transgress and hold back your strength
Which even sleep, subduer of all, cannot seize
Nor even the inexhaustible months of the gods;
You, who are master of gleaming radiant Olympus!
And so now, as thereafter and in the past, this custom prevails:
In mortal life, there is no prosperity without misfortune.

Far-ranging hope delights many mortals
While many are tricked because deprived
Of their judgement by desires -
For what is to come, is not seen,
Until the foot is burnt
In the heat of the fire.

620 And there is wisdom in this renowned saying:
Sometimes the bad has appearance of nobility
To those whose reasoning is damaged by the god,
And only for a short season is there exemption
From misfortune.

But here is Haemon, youngest and last of your sons:
Is he in grief at the fate of the nubile maiden,
Antigone, promised to him in marriage
And in great anguish because cheated

Out of that wedding?

[Enter Haemon]

Creon

Soon we will see - and more than some prophet would have done.

My son, have you heard of that decision that brings to an end

Your promised bride, and so come in rage at your father -

Or, whatsoever that I do, are we still friends?

Haemon

You are my father and your opinions

Possess worth and correctly guide me.

For me, no wedding is of greater value

Than the noble lead you give.

Creon

640 Yes, my son, you must be so directed by your heart

And in all things stand behind your father's opinion.

It is for this that a man prays to have his offspring grow

Hearing and obeying him in his home:

That they treat his enemies as worthless

While esteeming his friends as they do his father.

But of those who sow unprofitable children,

You can only say that they have breed toil for themselves

And provided their enemies with much laughter.

Do not, my son, cast out your reason
For the pleasures of a woman,
For embraces become cold when a bad woman
Is your bed-partner:
And a bad relative is a large festering wound.

Now, with loathing, spit on that girl
And let her marry someone in Hades!
Since, from all of our folk she alone
I have caught in visible disobedience,
I will not show myself false to these folk -
Thus, I shall put her to death.

So let her chant to Zeus, guardian of kinsfolk!
Were I to nourish disorder in my own blood-relations
Then I would most certainly be doing so within our clan.
Any man who is honest within his own family
Will, by the folk, be seen to be fair -
And whomsoever by force transgresses the customs
And presumes to command his master
Will never be applauded by me,
Since those whom the folk appoint, must be obeyed
In what is small, what is fair, and what is not.
I have confidence that such a man
Would nobly rule as he would be willing to be ruled
And would, in a storm of spears, be steadfast

And stand his ground - a valiant comrade at one's side.

The worst ill is to have no leader:

It is this which destroys clans,

Which causes families to disperse,

Which makes a spear-alliance to turn and break

Just as of those who do stand firm

The greater number are saved due to obeying commands.

Therefore, we must defend the rule-givers

And never let a woman overcome us:

If we must be thrust down, it is better done by a man

680 So that we are not called weaker-than-a-woman.

Chorus

To me, unless the seasons have cheated me,

Your sayings appear to be wise sayings.

Haemon

Father, it is the gods who root reason in mortals

And, of all our possessions, it is the greatest.

Of your sayings, I could not, even had I the experience,

Say wherein they are not correct

Although another might, with fairness, differ.

For me, it is natural to watch, for you,

All that others say or do or blame you for:

Your eyes awe the common man
So that they say only what you delight in hearing.
But I have heard how under cover of darkness
The clan grieve for this girl -
For, of all women, she is the most undeserving
To perish, dishonoured, for so honourable a deed:
With her very own brother slaughtered,
She did not leave him unburied
To be eaten by carrion dogs or any bird.
Does she not merit a golden honour?
700 Such is the talk spread in secret.

For myself, there is no possession I value higher
Than your prosperity, father:
What, for a youngster, can have greater glory
Than a father's prospering fame -
Or, for a father, that of his children?
Do not keep only a single mask for yourself
In that what you say, and nothing else, is correct.
For whosoever supposes that he alone is wise
Or that his words or his nature are above all others
Will, when split open, be revealed as empty.
Certainly a man, clever though he be,
Can without shame learn many things
And so still stretch himself.
See how beside the torrents of Winter

The trees whose branches yield are kept safe
While those that resist are lain waste to their roots
Just as whomsoever holds, taut and unyielding,
The sail of a ship will overturn it,
Completing the voyage with the deck downturned.

Thus, give way and so permit your anger to change.
If I, though young, may put forth my understanding
I would say it would be excellent if men by nature
Knew about everything - but if not, and seldom are they
So inclined, it is noble to learn
From those who speak what is honourable.

Chorus

Master - it is reasonable, if his words are in season,
That you are instructed, as he has been by you. Both your words are fortunate.

Creon

Is it natural that those of such an age as me
Be taught how to reason by men of such an age as he?

Haemon

It is only fair. Although I am young,
Behold my acts not the seasons I have seen!

Creon

730 Can respect be given to those who work mischief?

Haemon

I would never entreat anyone to respect what is bad.

Creon

But is she not attacked by that sickness?

Haemon

The whole clan of Thebes deny it.

Creon

Is the clan to tell me what I ought to do then?

Haemon

Observe - you are speaking as though very young.

Creon

Am I then to rule this land as I deem, or as others do?

Haemon

It is not a clan if it is the possession of any one man.

Creon

It is the custom for a clan to have a master.

Haemon

You would make a good ruler - alone in the wilderness!

Creon

740 So - he is fighting for that woman!

Haemon

My concern is for you - so you are the woman!

Creon

Totally shameful - to dispute so with your father!

Haemon

Not when I see you missing your duty.

Creon

Do I err in respecting my own authority?

Haemon

You do not respect it when you tread on the offerings due to the gods.

Creon

You stain your character by coming second - to a woman!

Haemon

You will never find me overcome by dishonour.

Creon

But all your words are for that girl.

Haemon

And also for you, me and the gods below us.

Creon

750 While she lives you will never marry her.

Haemon

Then she will die and in dying destroy another.

Creon

Are you so bold that you make threats?

Haemon

Is it a threat to speak against hollow thoughts?

Creon

Suffering shall instruct you - for your own hollow reasoning!

Haemon

Were you not my father, I would say you could not judge things correctly.

Creon

You slave of a woman! Do not babble at me!

Haemon

You like speaking - but not hearing a reply!

Creon

Is that so? By Olympus know

That you will soon suffer for reviling me with insults!

760 Bring that hated thing here so that she will die

Now beside her bridegroom and before his eyes!

Haemon

No - do not believe that she will perish beside me

Or that you with your eyes will ever see my face again.

So, rage on then at such kinsfolk as can endure it!

[Exit Haemon]

Chorus

Master - that man, hurled by anger, has swiftly gone.

Someone of such an age as he, when injured, has a strong resolve.

Creon

Let him experience and understand more than other men.

But, whatever, the two girls shall not escape their fate.

Chorus

So you still intend to slay them both?

Creon

Your words are well taken. Not she whose hands are clean.

Chorus

What fate had you planned for the other's death?

Creon

She will be led to where the paths are desolate of mortals

And be concealed alive in a rock-hewn tomb

With as much food before her as is required for expiation

So that the whole clan escapes pollution.

There she may if she asks have success from dying
By giving reverence to Hades, the only god she reveres -
Or she will learn at last though late by this
780 That it is useless toil to so revere Hades.

[Exit Creon]

Chorus

Eros - unconquered in battle:
Eros - despoiler of wealth
Who at night keeps vigil by the soft lips
Of a young girl
And who widely roams over sea and land
To even the wildest dwellings!

No immortal can escape you
Nor any mortals while they live:
You possess them all with your frenzy.
Those who are fair become unfair
And are disgraced
As you wrest aside their reason -
You who now trouble these kinsmen with strife!
Passion is victorious - for a comely, clear-eyed, bride -
And this power is seated there beside the ancient lawgivers,
800 There where the goddess Aphrodite mocks us,
With no resistance.

But now, as I look there, I am carried beyond that decree
And cannot from their source block these burgeoning tears
As I see Antigone passing to that inner chamber
Wherein we will all be quiet.

[Enter Antigone]

Antigone

You see me, fathers of our clan,
Go forth on my last journey
By the light of this sun that hereafter
I shall not see again.

Hades - he who makes all of us quiet -
Leads me while I live
To the banks of Acheron
And there shall be no bridal songs for me
To share in,
No nuptial hymns in praise -
Since I shall be bride to Acheron.

Chorus

With renown, and praised, you depart
For the tomb of the dead:
No wasting sickness struck you,

No sword of punishment was your fate;
Instead - you who were independent of the decrees of others
Shall, alone among mortals, descend while you live
Down into Hades.

Antigone

I have heard of the sorrowful death
Of that Phrygian guest who was Tantalus' daughter,
Who on the highest part of Sipylus was overpowered
By sprouting rock clinging to her like ivy.
There, heavy rain and snow - such are men's stories -
Never departs as she lamenting moistens with tears
Her brows and ridges.
In the same way some god shall lay me down to sleep.

Chorus

Yet she was a goddess, born of gods
While you and I are mortals, born of mortals.
So it is a great thing to perish so
Since it will be said you are equal to the gods
Having shared in such a fate:
While living, and afterwards in your dying.

Antigone

I am laughed at! By the gods of our fathers

840 Could this not wait - must I be insulted here in this light?

My clan! You - wealthy kinsmen;
You, springs of Dirce, and you, sacred-groved Thebes of the beautiful chariots!
I have you, at least, to bear witness
How and by what decree I go with no lamentations from my kin
To be placed in that fresh cairn
Which shall be my grave:
I, the unfortunate one,
Who shall be among neither mortals nor corpses
But instead a foreigner to the living and the dead.

Chorus

You approached the boundary of boldness
And, at the high altar of the goddess, Judgement,
You, my child, heavily stumbled.
Perhaps your ordeal is retribution because of your father.

Antigone

You touch that concern which pains me -
The often-ploughed lamentations made for my father
860 And the whole destiny of the famed clan of Labdacus.

That bane of a mother's bed
Where she lay in ill-fated intercourse
With her own child, my father!

From such was I, who endures, brought forth
And now I, cursed and unwed,
Go forth to stay with them
Since you my brother who found your ill-fortune
By your marriage, in your death
Killed my being.

Chorus

To honour is honourable
But he who has authority cannot allow
Anyone to overstep his authority:
Your obstinate character ruined you.

Antigone

Without friends, without lamentations,
With no bridal songs am I, suffering, taken
To what lies prepared for me.
No more, it is decreed, shall I the unfortunate see
The sacred eye that is the sun:
And there are no tears for my destiny,
No kin who lament.

[Enter Creon]

Creon

If songs and wailings were before death

They would never stop, if it was useful to say them!
Swiftly, lead her away! And, as I have said, enclose her
Within her embracing cairn then leave her alone
And desolate if necessary to die
Or to live buried and concealed.
We are then pure concerning this maiden.
Whatever! - she shall be deprived of residing here on earth.

Antigone

My bridal-chamber is a carved-out tomb,
A chamber always to guard me, wherein I shall pass
To my own, of whom the greater number have perished already -
Received by Persephone to be among the dead.
Last and most ill-fated of all I shall descend down
Before my portion of living has expired.

But I have within the strong hope that this my setting out
Will be welcome to you my father; pleasing to you
My mother; and pleasing also to you my brother -
900 For when death came, with my own hands
I moistened and dressed you and poured libations
Over your graves. Now, Polynices, it for covering your body
That I have won such as this.

Yet, to the wise, I rightly honoured you
Although I might not - had it been my own child

Or my husband who had died and was putrid -
Have taken up that task against the folk.
To what custom do I do homage in speaking thus?
My husband dead, I might have had another
And a child by this other man in place of the first-born
But with my mother and father hidden in Hades
No brother could ever come forth again.
Such was the custom by which I honoured you,
My own brother - but Creon believed it wrong
And dangerously reckless:
So now by his hands he forcibly leads me away.
There are no nuptials in bed, no bridal songs,
No wedding, no share in nurturing children
920 As I pass while living to my grave and my death.

What divine decree have I transgressed?
Shall I, the unfortunate, look again to the gods?
What ally can be invoked
Now I for my respect am said to be dis-respectful?
Yet if these things are fair to the gods
Then I will experience my mistake
While if it is these others who are mistaken
Then may they experience in retribution
No greater ills than those they give to me.

Chorus

The same spirit, gusting stormfully, still sways
In the same way this girl.

Creon

And because of that, trouble will befall
Her guards over their slowness!

Antigone

This therefore brings closer
That death!

Creon

I do not encourage you to believe
That that will not be fulfilled.

Antigone

Community of my fathers on this Theban soil!
You elder gods!
No longer do they delay.

940 Behold me, you Theban lords,
The solitary descendant of your nobility
And how I can treated and by what kind of man
For so respecting honour!

[Exit Antigone]

Chorus

So endured Danaë - for whom the light of heaven
Was bartered for a chamber wrought in bronze
And where, in that enclosing tomb,
She was shut in.
She also, my child, was of noble birth:
She to whom Zeus dispensed his wet golden seed.
But numinous is the power of destiny -
It cannot be escaped from by wealth, by combat,
By ramparts, by taking to a ship upon a black-storming sea.

Thus was the son of Dryas - he of the swift anger
And Chief of the Edonians - tamed
By Dionysus for his wrothful taunts
And confined, bound by rock,
Where in his strange frenzy
His bursting fierceness trickled from him.
He came to know the god who had touched him,
With frenzy, for his taunting tongue -
For he had sought to stop the god-possessed women
And their Bacchic fire, provoking thus
The flute-loving Muses.

By Cyanaei of the two-fold sea
Are the Bosphorus shores
And Thracian Salmydessus
Where Ares, dwelling close by the citadel,
Beheld the two sons of Phineas
Blinded by ruinous wounds
Dealt by that savage second wife -
A blinding of orbs the seeing of which brought vengeance -
By sticking at them with the points
Of her weaver's spindle, blood staining her hands.

Anguished by this anguish they cried aloud
980 Their misfortune - those born from a mother's unhappy marriage:
She of the fabled seed of Erechtheus,
Reared in faraway caves
Amid her father's storms -
She of Boreas, swift as horse over steep hill,
Who, though child of a god,
Was, my child, by those long-living Fates
Attacked.

[Enter Tiresias, guided by a boy]

Tiresias

Theban lords, I come here sharing another's steps,
This one seeing for us both - for the blind

Should be guided along their path.

Creon

Well, venerable Tiresias, what that is new brings you here?

Tiresias

I shall instruct you. Do oracles persuade you?

Creon

Never in the past have I dismissed your judgement.

Tiresias

And thus have you straightly steered this clan.

Creon

I can testify to how I have profited from you.

Tiresias

Know then that fate is ready to cut you down.

Creon

What? I shiver at your words!

Tiresias

Learn by hearing of these signs of my art.

Just now as at the place of augury I sat,
1000 Where all kinds of birds gather,
I heard voices of birds I did not know -
A bad feverish foreign screeching -
And sensed they were tearing at each other
With their deadly claws:
And the rushing of their wings left no doubt.

In awe, I went straight to rouse a blazing
Altar-fire to burn sacrifice. But Hephaestus
Did not seize the offering by flames.
Instead, puss oozed from the thighs down to the embers
To spit and smoke while the gall-bladder swelled
To burst open and the fat covering the thighs dripped out.

Such I learnt from this boy here
Of the sign-less divination from the failed sacrifice -
He gives me a lead, as I give a lead to others.
And it is your judgement that brought sickness to our clan.
The altar, the hearths - all of them -
Have been soiled by the suppurating food torn
By birds and by dogs from the ill-fated son of Oedipus.
1020 Wherefore the gods do not accept our sacrificial supplications
Nor our burnt-offerings:
And no bird in its screeching cry gives favourable signs
Since they have devoured the blood-soaked fat of a slain warrior.

Understand these things, my son. All mortals have in common
That sometimes they aim wrong, and miss - but after an error
A man is no longer luckless or thoughtless
If he wills to cure the ill he has fallen into
By not remaining idle:
Obstinacy and awkwardness bring reproaches.
Give way to the dead: do not goad those who have fallen.
Is it courageous to kill the dead again?
Carefully have I judged this; carefully have I spoken - for it is pleasing
To learn from such careful words from such words
Are profitable to you.

Creon

Old man - all of you like archers shoot arrows at me as target,
And not even by your divinations am I left
Unassailed by you and your breed
To whom I am the customer who buys your goods!
Gain profits and customers, if you so design,
By the electrum of Sardis and Indian gold
But you shall not conceal that person in a grave.
1040 Not even if the eagles of Zeus tear him
For food and carry it away to Zeus' throne -
Not even then in dread of such defilement
Will I submit to him being buried!
For I know well that no mortal

Has the strength to defile the gods.
Even the cleverest of mortals, old Tiresias,
Are cast down in dishonour
When they for profit grace dishonourable words with elegance.

Tiresias

But can any man see, or any explain -

Creon

What? Is this to be some common saying?

Tiresias

- why wise counsel is superior to all other possessions?

Creon

Why? I suggest lack of judgement is the greater mischief.

Tiresias

Your nature is full of that disease.

Creon

I have no desire - in answer - to contradict a prophet!

Tiresias

Yet you spoke of me saying false prophecies!

Creon

Yes - because the breed of prophets loves silver!

Tiresias

And that of Kings loves shameful gain!

Creon

Can you see that when you speak you are speaking to your master?

Tiresias

I see! This citadel of yours you saved because of me.

Creon

You are skilled in divination but love to do harm!

Tiresias

1060 You stir me to express what is inviolate and hidden in my heart!

Creon

Bring it forth! Do not speak it only for profit.

Tiresias

Were there any, I would not expect you to have any share of it.

Creon

You will see that you cannot buy my heart!

Tiresias

Know then that there will not be, for you, many more

Loops which the swift sun will complete

Before you see one born from your own loins a corpse

In exchange for corpses because you have cast down

One of those from above

By dishonourably settling one, alive, in a tomb.

And also because you held here from the gods below

A corpse, bereft, profaned, because without funeral rites.

Not you, not any of the gods above

Can overpower him now -

For this is outrage by you to them and shall destroy you

Since the Furies, of Hades and the gods, will ambush you

To catch you by those same ills.

Observe if I speak laden with silver

For there will not be a long delay hereafter

Before such things are visible and the men and women of your abode

1080 Will shriek, when hatred casts into disorder all those clans

Whose own were mangled and buried by dogs or wild beasts

Or birds of prey carrying away a profane stench

To those sacred clan sanctuaries.

Since you grieved me, as an archer these
Are the sure arrows I in anger direct at your heart
And from whose burns you cannot escape.

So, boy, take me away to my dwelling
And let him loose his anger on those who are younger
And nurture his thought by keeping his tongue quiet
So he obtains better judgement
Than the judgement he now possesses.

[Exit Tiresias]

Chorus

My Lord, that person has left hurling fearful prophecies!
I am certain that ever since hair - once black
Now white - crowned me, he has never
Given false utterances for the clan.

Creon

This also I know and my heart is troubled.
on one side, I fear to yield; on the other,
I fear opposition and thus misfortune striking.

Chorus

Son of Menoeceus, you should accept good counsel.

Creon

What, then, do I need to do? Speak, and I shall consider it.

Chorus

1100 Go, and loosen the maiden from her cavern

And build a tomb to lay within it he who lies exposed.

Creon

And that is your advice? You believe I should give way?

Chorus

Yes, my Lord, and swiftly. For those swift-footed wretches

Of the gods cut down the misguided.

Creon

It is hard to give up what it is the desire of my heart to do -

But yet I cannot fight against those forces.

Chorus

Go and do these things - do not turn them over to another.

Creon

As I am so shall I go - now! Have follow those here,
And those others - grasping axes in their hands -
To rush to that place overlooking here!
Since I have turned my opinion around
I, who bound her, should also release her.
I am anxious because it seems that it is best
Throughout one's life to keep to what is ancient custom.

[Exit Creon]

Chorus

You of the many names! Glory of the Cadmean bride
And kin to Zeus of the roaring thunder!
You, who enclose illustrious Italia
And who rule over the public Eleusinian plain
Of Deo!
1120 Bacchus! - Whose frenzied Bacchants dwell
In your clan-mother Thebes,
She seeded by the savage dragon
Near the smooth water of Ismenus!

Above that two-crested rock you are glimpsed
Through the smoke of flaming-torches -
There where your frenzied Corycian Nymphs go,
By Castile's Spring!

You who came from the ivy-covered hills of Nysa
And that green shore of the many grapes
To visit the community of Thebes
Amid that immortal cry: E-U-A-I!

Of all the clans, ours you honour above all others -
Your mother, stricken by lightning.
So now, since a strong sickness overcomes
All of our clan, pass here with your healing feet,
Over the cliffs of Parnassus or over the Strait of Sighs!

You who dance with the fire-breathing stars,
Who overshadows the voices of the night,
The son born of Zeus -
My Lord, appear! -
With your Thyiad followers
Who in frenzy dance through the night
For you, their Master, Iacchus!

[Enter Messenger]

Messenger

You who reside by this dwelling of Cadmus and of Amphion,
There is no way of mortal living
Which I would either praise or blame,
For frequently fate raises the unfortunate
And brings down those of good fortune

1160 And no one can divine the actual being of mortal things.

Creon was once I believe to be envied
For he saved this land of Cadmus from those hostile to it
And guided it well: he who flourished in his nobly born children.
But now, all this is gone - for if a man betrays
What is delightful to him, I do not hold him as living
Since he is but an animated corpse.
Have an abundance of property if such is your aim:
Live in the manner of a great King;
But if they provide no pleasure, I would not obtain them
From any man for such things are as a covering of smoke
Compared to what delights.

Chorus

What grief do you carry for the Chieftains here?

Messenger

Death. And the dead accuse the living.

Chorus

What? Who the killer? Who the slain? Speak!

Messenger

Haemon has died. Bloodied by a kindred hand.

Chorus

Was it by his father's hand - or his own?

Messenger

By his own in wroth at his father for his killing.

Chorus

You - our prophet! How perfect was your skill!

Messenger

So the thing is - as to the rest, you must decide.

Chorus

1180 I see, nearly here, a sorrowing Eurydice,
Creon's wife - perhaps fate brings her from her dwelling.
Or has she heard about her child?

[Enter Eurydice]

Eurydice

You clansmen - I felt your words
As I departed to greet and offer supplication to the goddess Pallas.

As I drew back the bolts to open the gate
A voice - woeful for my family - struck my ears
And in fear I crouched backwards into the arms
Of my servant, unable to move.

So, you, tell again what message you brought
And I shall hear it since I am not without experience of misfortune.

Messenger

My Lady - I who was present shall tell
What passed and disclose all what was said.
Why should I soften you with lies
Which will soon be revealed? Disclosure is straightforward.

As a guide I attended your husband
To where the plain ends at that place where, unlamented,
Was the dog-torn body of Polynices.
1200 To the goddess of the crossing-trackways and to Pluto
We prayed for them to with-hold their frenzy and be friendly
And with pure libations washed what had been left,
Gathering them together to burn them with newly-plucked boughs
And raise over them a high tumulus of his native soil.

Next, we went toward to enter the stone-lined cavern
Of the maiden - that bridal-chamber for Hades -
When, still far off, one of us heard a voice loudly wailing
Beside that nuptial chamber bereft of funeral rites,

And came to inform Creon our Master
Who as he went near was ambushed by a wretched strange cry
And who, mournfully lamenting, said:
Wretch that I am, is that what I divine it to be?
Shall I go along the most unpleasant track I have ever taken?
Is that the pleasing voice of my son? Servants! - swiftly go
Nearer there in the gap where the earth has been dug
And the stones torn away, and enter that mouth to see
If it is Haemon's voice that I heard or if the gods have deceived me.

This order by our despairing Master we obeyed
1220 And at the end of the tumulus we beheld her
Hanging by the neck, a noose of threaded fine linen
Fastening her and he embracing her around her middle,
Wailing for his bride - destroyed and now below -
At his father's deeds and his own ill-fated marriage.
Seeing him, his father gave a fearful cry
And, loudly lamenting, went within to call to him -
Unfortunate one! Why have you done this deed?
What resolve possessed you? What misfortune overpowered you?
My son - I in supplication beseech you to come out!

The boy gave no answer but looked at him
With wild eyes then spat on his face
And drew his double-edged sword.
But his father hastened to retreat

And then the ill-fated one enraged at himself forthwith
Stretched himself to lean on that point
Until half the length was in his side.
Then, still breathing, he with but feeble arms
Embraced the maiden to gasp and spurt forth a swift stream
Of his dripping blood upon her white cheek.
1240 Corpse lay upon corpse as he the unfortunate completed his rites
Of marriage in the dwelling of Hades.
Thus, this shows to mortals that of the ills conferred upon men
The greatest is privation of wisdom.

[Exit Eurydice]

Chorus

To what is this like? For now the lady goes away
Without speaking of honour or dishonour.

Messenger

I also am amazed. Yet my own hope is nourished
Since having heard about her unfortunate child it would not be dignified
For her to lament before her people.
Rather, she will in the concealment of her dwelling appoint her servants

To lament with her in grief.

She is not so lacking in experience that she would err.

Chorus

About this - I do not know, since an excessive silence
Is no less of a portent than an abundance of wailing.

Messenger

We will be certain whether she keeps a secret
Shrouded in her passionate heart since I shall enter the dwelling.
Your words may indeed be fortunate - for this excessive silence
Could well portend something.

[Exit Messenger]

Chorus

Here comes our Lord, himself -
In his hands a memorial as a token,
If it is fitting for me to say it, of his own error
1260 And not that of some stranger.

Creon

I lament -
For those bad errors of judgement
Which condemned others to death!
You see here the killer

And he of the same family whom he killed.
I cry because of my own ill-fated plans
And for my young son who died so young.
You - who perished, who left us,
Not because your plans were wrong, but because mine were.

Chorus

Thus, too late, you see the meaning of customs.

Creon

A dreadful learning! It was a god who, attacking me
On my head with a great weight, made me to wander wildly
And who overturned and stamped on my joy!
I lament - for wearisome are the toils given to mortals.

[Enter Messenger]

Messenger

Master - you came bearing that grief in your hands,
Seeing that one, but you will soon see
1280 These others stored within your dwelling.

Creon

What further ills could follow ills such as these?

Messenger

That your wife has died - mother in every way to that corpse,
And unfortunate - from fresh wounds.

Creon

Ah!

How can I purify that haven of Hades?

I am destroyed!

You who convey the sorrow of these bad tidings -

What message can you speak?

You, there - do you pursue me to kill me again?

What misfortune is mine! Speak your message of a wife's fate:

Of this new sacrifice heaped upon those killed!

Messenger

See - it is no longer concealed.

*[The doors to Creon's dwelling open, to reveal
the body of Eurydice]*

Creon

I behold this second grief!

What fate still awaits me now -

Me, who has held in my hands our child

And who in misery looks upon her, a corpse.

1300 I lament for you - the ill-fated mother, and you, her child.

Messenger

By the altar with a keen-edged knife

She released her eyes to darkness, lamenting

For the death of Megareus - he renowned for his fate -

Who went before him, there: her last deed

To invoke ills upon you, the killer of her children.

Creon

Fear rises within me!

Will no one strike me

In the chest with a cutting sword?

Me - in misery

Whose misery is mixed with anguish.

Messenger

She denounced you as being guilty

Both of the death of he who died before, and of this other one.

Creon

She who is gone - how was her blood shed?

Messenger

She was stricken by her own hand
As there was loud lament made at the fate of her son.

Creon

No other mortals but me can be denounced
For this. It was I, and no other, who killed.
I, who here disclose this. You servants -
Lead me swiftly away!
For I am no more than nothing.

Chorus

There is something to be gained from this - if troubles are a gain -
Since it is excellent to shorten our ills.

Creon

Let it appear - that fate
Which brings me to my end:
This is the best and highest of all
Since then I shall never behold another day!

Chorus

Such things are yet to arrive. Before then, it is necessary to be practical.
What is to arrive shall be attended to by they who order it.

Creon

But all that I desire was contained within that vow.

Chorus

Then do not make another vow.

Mortals cannot be delivered from the misfortunes of their fate.

Creon

Lead this foolish man away!

1340 My child - and you, also. Wretch that I am,

It was not my purpose to slay you.

Now there is nothing for me to look upon,

Nothing to hold onto:

In my hands, everything went wrong

As a heavy fate I could not carry

Leapt upon me.

[Exit Creon]

Chorus

Judgement is the greater part of good fortune

Just as it is necessary not to be disrespectful to the gods -

For the great words of the excessive boaster

Are repaid by great blows

And this, as one grows old, teaches judgement.

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cc David Wulstan Myatt 1990, 2018

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